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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9104
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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E.O. 12065 GDS 1-16-85 (THAYER, UVONNE) OR-P
TAGS SHUM, PINS, PINT, AR
SUBJECT THREE ABDUCTIONS HIGHLIGHT POLITICAL COMPLEXITIES

SUMMARY: IN THE PAST WEEK, TWO ABDUCTED JOURNALISTS
REAPPEARED AND ONE ABDUCTED ARGENTINE DIPLOMAT WAS FOUND
DROWNED IN A RIVER. NO CLEAR EXPLANATION WAS PROVIDED FOR
ANY OF THE THREE CASES, ALTHOUGH ARGENTINE AUTHORITIES
SPOKE OUT AGAINST THE CRIMES AND A JUDICIAL INVESTIGATION
HAS BEEN LAUNCHED TO RESOLVE THE DIPLOMATS MURDER. KID-
NAPPING FOR RANSOM, HARASSMENT OF CHILEAN RESIDENTS BECAUSE
OF THE BEAGLE DISPUTE, INTERNAL POLITICAL AND/OR MILITARY
RIVALRY, TERRORIST CONNECTIONS AND FACTIONAL WARNING ARE
AMONG RUMORED MOTIVES BEHIND THE THREE CASES, POINTING UP
THE COMPLEXITY IN ASSIGNING BLAME IN THIS VIOLENT AND
STILL TROUBLED COUNTRY. END SUMMARY.

1. (U) ARGENTINE DIPLOMAT ELENA HOLMBERG, WHO WAS

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KIDNAPPED IN DOWNTOWN BUENOS AIRES DECEMBER 20, WAS
FOUND DROWNED IN THE RIO LUJAN ON JAN 11. TWO

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AUTOPSIES CONFIRMED HER DEATH BY DROWNING SHORTLY AFTER HER ABDUCTION. FOREIGN MINISTER PASTOR STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE MURDER AND DECLARED THAT THE "CULPRITS MUST PAY" AND FEDERAL JUDGE MARQUARDT OPENED AN EXTENSIVE AND WELL PUBLICIZED INVESTIGATION INTO THE CASE. HOLMBERG'S BODY LAY IN STATE IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY BEFORE HER BURIAL JAN 14 WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY INTERIOR MINISTER HARGUINDEGUY, HOLMBERG'S UNCLE FORMER PRESIDENT ALEJANDRO LANUSSE, AND OTHER HIGH RANKING OFFICIALS. SOME CONFUSION DEVELOPED OVER THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY WHEN THE BENAVIDEZ CEMETARY WHERE THE BODY WAS FIRST DEPOSITED SENT THE WRONG BODY TO BUENOS AIRES FOR A COURT ORDERED AUTOPSY. JUDGE MARQUARDT BRIEFLY HELD 17 PERSONS CONNECTED WITH THE REMOVAL OF THE BODY UNTIL IT WAS CLARIFIED THAT HOLMBERG'S BODY HAD BEEN MIXED UP WITH ANOTHER DROWNING VICTIM RECOVERED FROM LUJAN RIVER THE SAME DAY.

2. (U) JORGE ALBERTO FONTEVIECCHIA, EDITOR OF THE NEWSMAGAZINE LA SEMANA, REAPPEARED JAN 13 AFTER HAVING BEEN KIDNAPPED BY THREE ARMED MEN THE WEEK BEFORE AS HE WAS DRIVING HOME FROM WORK. THE PRESS ALLUDED TO A RANSOM DEMAND, BUT NO OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION OF THE KIDNAPPERS OR MOTIVE HAS BEEN MADE PUBLIC. EARLIER PRESS REPORTS ALSO SPECULATED THAT THE ABDUCTION MAY HAVE BEEN LINKED TO TWO RECENT LA SEMANA REPORTS, ONE ALLEGEDLY INDICATING UNDERSTANDING FOR THE SANINISTA "GUERRILLAS" IN NICARAGUA AND ANOTHER FUGITIVE LABOR LEADER CASILDO HERRERAS.

3. (U) CHILEAN JOURNALIST RUBEN GOMEZ QUESADA
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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REAPPEARED ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF JUJUY ON JAN 11, FOURTEEN DAYS AFTER HAVING BEEN ABDUCTED FROM HIS SALTA HOME. (SEE BUENOS AIRES 0147 NOTAL.) QUESADA GOMEZ, A LONG TIME ARGENTINE RESIDENT, WORKED FOR THE SALTA NEWSPAPER EL INTRANSIGENTE.

4. (U) THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, IN A LETTER TO PRESIDENT VIDELA DATED JAN 11, EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN ABOUT THE LACK OF ACTION AND FAILURE TO RESPOND TO THE PROBLEM OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED AFTER BEING KIDNAPPED. THE LETTER EXPRESSED CONDEMNATION AND HORROR AT THE KIDNAPPING AND DEATH

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OF ELENA HOLMBERG AND REFERRED TO THE THEN UNEXPLAINED KIDNAPPINGS OF GOMEZ QUESADA AND FONTEVECCHIA. ATTACHED TO THE LETTER WAS AN ADDITIONAL 4,550 SIGNATURES TO A PETITION SIGNED BY 37,000 PEOPLE BEFORE CHRISTMAS CONCERNING DISAPPEARANCE CASES AND A LIST OF 4,381 DOCUMENTED CASES OF DISAPPEARED PERSONS.

5. [REDACTED] THE THREE CASES POINT UP THE DIFFICULTY IN DETERMINING THE MOTIVE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN WHAT HAS BECOME THE COMMONPLACE PROCEDURE OF ABDUCTION AND EVEN MURDER OF DISPARATE VICTIMS. THE GOMEZ QUESADA ABDUCTION APPEARS TO BE A CASE OF BLATANT HARASSMENT OF CHILEAN RESIDENTS, DUE TO THE BEAGLE CHANNEL CONTROVERSY, IN THE TENSE BORDER PROVINCES OF SALTA AND JUJUY. THE ABDUCTION OF TWO CHILEAN RESIDENTS IN SALTA EFFECTIVELY PROVOKED THE DEPARTURE OF MOST OF THE RESIDENT CHILEAN POPULATION, ACCORDING TO A SOURCE IN REFTEL. (A UNHCR SOURCE SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE SMALL CHILEAN REFUGEE POPULATION OF SALTA AND JUJUY REMAINS THERE AND ITS MEMBERS HAVE NOT BEEN INTIMIDATED BY LOCAL OFFICIALS. THE JOINT SUBMISSION OF THE DISPUTE TO PAPAL MEDIATION HAS APPARENTLY RELAXED THE SITUATION OF CHILEAN RESIDENTS IN ARGENTINA FOR THE MOMENT.)
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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6. [REDACTED] THE FONTEVECCHIA ABDUCTION IS LESS CLEAR. KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM WAS HINTED AT IN THE PRESS, AS WERE SUGGESTIONS THAT FONTEVECCHIA PROVOKED OFFICIAL DISPLEASURE BY PUBLISHING STORIES ALLEGEDLY FAVORABLE TO THE SANDINISTA MOVEMENT IN NICARAGUA OR TO INDICTED FUGITIVE LABOR LEADER CASILDO HERRERAS. PRIVATELY, IT IS SAID FONTEVECCHIA'S MAGAZINE WAS SUPPORTIVE OF AND/OR BANKROLLED BY ADMIRAL MASSERA,
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WHICH SPARKED ARMY WRATH. OTHERS HINT DARKLY HIS ABDUCTION WAS TO EMBARRASS PRESIDENT VIDELA. (THESE LAST TWO ALLEGATIONS -- POINTING THE FINGER ALTERNATIVELY AT THE ARMY AND THE NAVY SURFACE ROUTINELY IN EVERY ABDUCTIN CASE.) AT ANY RATE, THE ABDUCTION APPEARS TO BE MOTIVATED BY POLITICAL RATHER THAN ANTI-TERRORISM CONSIDERATIONS IN A SOCIETY WHERE ABDUCTION AND EVEN PERMANENT DISAPPEARANCE HAVE BECOME A ROUTINE MECHANISM FOR HANDLING POLITICAL FEUDS.

7. [REDACTED] THE HOLMBERG DROWNING APPEARS ALSO TO FALL WITHIN THE POLITICAL CRIME CATEGORY, WITH DARK CONNECTIONS WITH THE MASSERA-ARMY RIVALRY. THE MOST OFTEN HEARD RUMOR IS THAT HOMBERG HAD A SERIOUS FALLING OUT WITH MASSERA POLITICAL OPERATIVES DURING HER TOUR AS CULTURAL OFFICER IN THE ARGENTINE EMBASSY IN PARIS. ACCORDING TO THIS VERSION, HOLMBER RETURNED
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TO BUENOS AIRES FROM PARIS TO "BLOW THE WHISTLE" ONE MASSERA INTIMATES' APPROPRIATION OF EMBASSY IMAGE-POLISHING CULTURAL FUNDS TO "BUY OFF" PROMINENT ARGENTINE EXILES ABROAD. NAVY USE OF VAST UNACCOUNTED FOR SUMS OF RECUPERATED MONTONERO MONEY ALSO FIGURES IN THESE STORIES. HOLMBERG'S IMMINENT REVELATION OF THESE SHADY DEALINGS CONVINCED THE NAVY TO DO AWAY WITH HER, ACCORDING TO THIS PLAUSIBLE ENOUGH VERSION. THE INEVITABLE COUNTERPOINT IS THAT THE ARMY DID HER

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IN AFTER SHE WAS PERSUADED (IN A TALK WITH FORN MIN UNDER SECRETARY CAPTAIN ALLARA) NOT TO GIVE AWAY HER DAMNING INFORMATION AGAINST THE NAVY. SOME ISOLATED VOICES GAMEDLY BLAME THE TERRORISTS FOR KILLING HOLMBERG TO SHOW THAT THEY STILL ENJOY THE CAPABILITY TO MOUNT SUCH OPERATIONS. THIS VERSION HAS FEW ADHERENTS, GIVEN THE ACKNOWLEDGED DEFEAT OF LEFTIST TERRORISTS IN ARGENTINA AND THE NATURE OF THE ABDUCTION. EMBASSY PARIS MAY BE ABLE TO PROVIDE US WITH MORE THOUGHTS ON HOLMBERG'S PARIS DEALINGS.

8. THE HOLMBERG MURDER HAS HAD A PROFOUND AND DISTURBING EFFECT WITHIN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THE ARGENTINE PUBLIC. THE FACT THAT SHE WAS A MEMBER OF A PROMINENT AND WELL-CONNECTED ARGENTINE FAMILY, A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WITH RIGHTWING TENDENCIES AND A STRONG DEFENDER OF ARGENTINA'S IMAGE MAKE HER CASE ALL THE MORE SHOCKING IN A SOCIETY INURED TO DAILY DISAPPEARANCES AND EATHS OF UNNAMED "MARXIST" ENEMIES OF THE STATE. HER ABDUCTION REPRESENTS THE INSITUATIONALIZATION OF TERRORIST TACTICS FOR POLITICAL MOTIVES REACHING BEYOND THE ANTI-TERRORISM CAMPAIGN AND REITERATES THE URGENCY OF REESTABLISHMENT OF LAW AND AN END TO EXTRALEGAL OPERATIONS IN ARGENTINA.

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